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ABSTRACT

A study sought answers for seven questions about the public's orientation toward television news. Television interviews were conducted with 8[illegible] adult residents of Dane County, Wisconsin, during October 1983 by trained graduate students and advanced undergraduates as part of a communications research methods course. Results showed that the public does not know very much about the structure and operation of television and newspaper news. Many people seem to have some information about how television works but few people have strong, well-organized patterns of knowledge of news operations. Answers to the question of what attitudes the public held about television and newspaper news revealed a mixture of strong supporters and strong detractors. Higher levels of knowledge were not associated with more favorable attitudes toward television news, and the varying levels of knowledge and attitude did not seem to be related to the time spent with the media and their news content. Finally, media knowledge and attitudes only slightly affected perceptions of helpfulness of television news and did not affect newspaper knowledge at all. Much more explication and research need to be done in developing the concepts of media news knowledge and attitudes. (DF)

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BEYOND BELIEVABILITY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WHAT THE PUBLIC KNOWS AND THINKS ABOUT TELEVISION AND NEWSPAPER NEWS

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Beyond Believability: A Comparative Analysis of
What the Public Knows and Thinks About Television and Newspaper News

Television news directors and others in the industry can take comfort in the quarter-century trend toward supremacy of television as the most credible source of news. When placed in head-to-head competition with other news media, Americans have increasingly chosen television as the medium most likely to be believed if conflicting accounts of news were to be presented.[1]

Optimistic findings of credibility combined with the heady wine of Watergate may have lulled the medium into complacency. Events such as the apparent lack of public concern with press exclusion from Grenada have reawakened a concern with what some observers regard as a decline in public support of the news media and its basic tenets.[2] One reason for this seeming lack of support may be widespread ignorance of the structure of the news media and how they work. Underlying the fears of low knowledge levels and hostile attitudes is the assumption that they affect the public use of news in important ways.

Given the important role ascribed to knowledge and attitudes about news, we would expect to find a well developed body of research findings. Unfortunately, such is not the case. Studies of public awareness of news media structure and operations are almost nonexistent.[3] Research on attitudes toward the news media is more common, but it tends to be narrowly focused on the issue of the relative believability of television versus print news. Other types of attitudes have been largely ignored.[4] Disturbing too is the lack of evidence for the presumed connection between knowledge of and attitudes toward news. Finally, little seems to be known about either the antecedents of knowledge and attitudes or their effects and consequences.

To correct these inadequacies, we attempted to answer seven research questions about public orientations toward television news:

1. How much does the public know about the structure and operation of newspaper media and television news?

2. What attitudes does the public hold about the news media?

3. Are higher levels of media knowledge associated with more favorable attitudes toward the news media?

4. What demographic and political factors and media experiences account for higher levels of awareness of media news operations?

5. Are these same background factors associated with more favorable attitudes toward the media?

6. Does it matter what the public knows and believes about newspaper and television news? That is, are varying levels of knowledge and attitude related to the time spent with the media and their news content, with attention paid to news, and the gratifications sought from political news?

7. Do levels of knowledge and favorability of attitudes toward news in a medium affect perceptions of completeness of news and the anticipation of helpfulness in an election campaign?

Methods

Telephone interviews were conducted with 823 adult residents of Dane County, Wisconsin, during October 1983. The sample was drawn by random digit dialing procedures with selection from each of 40 telephone exchanges proportionate to the number of private telephone lines. The response rate was more than 70 percent, with three call backs. Interviewing was conducted by trained graduate students and advanced undergraduates as part of a Communication Research Methods course. Interviews were authenticated by call-backs a month later.

Because Dane County includes the state capital, Madison, and the University, the sample was relatively young and well educated. The median age of our sample was 36, about five years younger than that of the U.S. adult population; 39 percent had completed college contrasted to only 17 percent shown for the nation in the 1980 Census data.

Measurement: Television Knowledge

A total of 13 items were used to measure Television News Knowledge. Four items were asked of the entire sample with the remaining questions distributed on alternate forms. The common items included:

1. How many commercial television stations operate in the Madison area? (3)
2. Can you name one of the major news services that serve the news media? (AP etc.)
3. Television stations routinely submit news stories to advertisers for approval, true or false? (false)
4. Advertising is the principle source of revenue for both newspapers and television stations, true or false? (true)

The remaining items included:

5. Can you name an audience rating service, a company that measures the size of an audience reached by networks and local television stations? (Nielsen, ARB etc.)
6. In terms of the number of reporters on staff, would you say that Madison's daily newspapers or Madison's commercial television stations have a larger staff? (newspapers)
7. Which Madison commercial television station has the largest coverage area? (WISC-TV)
8. The Federal Communication Commission limits the number of commercials that television stations may run each hour, true or false? (true)
9. The state requires reporters to have a license to practice journalism, true or false? (false)
10. Local media usually have more news than they have space or time for, true or false? (true)
11. Reporters have special privileges under law that allow them to attend government meetings even if the meetings are closed to the public, true or false? (false)

12. Reporters often know in advance what a politician plans to say in a speech since they are routinely provided with advance copies of the speech, true or false? (true)

13. During a political election campaign, each candidate is guaranteed free time for campaign commercials on television, true or false? (false)

Comparable total knowledge scores were developed for respondents asked for each of the two forms. Alpha levels were approximately .50 for each form. Factor analysis failed to identify sub-dimensions for television knowledge. As a result, we retained a single knowledge dimension.

Measurement: Newspaper Knowledge

Twelve items were used to measure Newspaper News Knowledge. Four items were asked of the entire sample with the rest on alternate forms. Seven of the twelve items concerned general media practices and thus were used in both the television and newspaper knowledge indices. The newspaper items used on both forms included:

1. Which Madison area daily newspaper has the largest circulation? (Wisconsin State Journal)

2. Newspapers can be suspended from publishing by a local government if they violate the public interest. (false)

The remaining newspaper items included:

3. Does the Federal Communication Commission regulate newspaper operations? (no)

4. Local newspapers get most of their stories from news services. (true)

5. Political parties can own daily newspapers. (true)

The seven general items listed for Television Knowledge are: 2,4,6,9,10,11 and 12. As was true for television, only a single knowledge dimension emerged. Comparable total knowledge scores were then developed for respondents asked each of the forms.

Measurement: Television News Attitudes

Two types of attitude items were used, each employing an underlying five-point Likert scale. The first set of six items were applicable to the news media generally.

1. News stories often reflect the personal political biases of the reporters who cover the events.
2. Politicians can usually pressure newspaper and television organizations into not releasing stories that would be embarrassing to their own political interests.
3. Reporters who cover candidates during election campaigns often become too involved with the candidates personally and write favorable stories about them.
4. Sometimes the media behave as if their own interests outweigh the interests of the public in the types of news that gets reported.
5. There should be stronger regulation of the news media by the government in order to protect individuals' rights to privacy.
6. The news media tend to cover political groups more on the basis of political controversy that might surround a group than on the political importance of a group.

The second set of four items was specifically addressed to television news content:

1. It tends to present only one side of an issue.
2. It only tells the bad things that happen.
3. It tends to fit my lifestyle better than other media (reverse scored).
4. It tends to make information easier to understand (reverse scored).

Because factor analysis revealed no interpretable dimensional structure, the two sets of items were combined into a single index of 10 items. The index produced an Alpha coefficient of .41.

Measurement: Newspaper Attitudes

The first six items used for Television News Attitudes pertained to the news media generally and were thus retained here. The second set of four were similar to those of television except that they referred to newspapers. All 10 items were combined into a single attitude index.

Measurement; Antecedent Variables

Antecedent variables potentially having an impact on knowledge and attitudes toward news were of three types: demographic, political and media experiences. Four demographic variables were included: age of respondent; education, in terms of years of schooling completed; perceived social class; and gender of the respondent.

Six political variables were used as antecedents: interest, discussion, knowledge, efficacy, partisanship, and ideology. Political interest was a single item asked in terms of general interest in politics using a 0 to 10 scale. Political discussion also used a 0 to 10 scale for frequency of discussion with five sources: spouse, friends, people at work, family, and people in other social groups. Political knowledge was indexed with a variety of items tapping awareness of candidates and structure of government at state, national and international levels. There was a maximum of 18 correct answers. Political efficacy consisted of four items measure on a five-point Likert scale (e.g., Most of our leaders are devoted to the service of our country). For those who said they support a political party, partisanship was measured on a seven-point scale ranging from very strong to not very strong. A seven-point scale was used for Ideology which ranged from very liberal to very conservative.

Two types of media experience variables were used. The first was the frequency of exposure current or recent to five prime time shows involving media characters: Lou Grant, WKRP in Cincinnati, Goodnight Beantown, Buffalo Bill, and The Mary Tyler Moore Show. An index was formed by summing frequency (a four-point scale) across

the five shows. The second variable, experiences with reporters, was the sum of four types of contacts: attended a meeting or news event later heard about in the media; interviewed for a news story; witnessed an accident or disaster later heard about in the media; and knowing someone quoted in a news story.

Measurement: Effect Variables

Potential effects of levels of knowledge and attitudes were assessed through various uses and perceptions of media news. Four television variables were examined: time spent with television; frequency (four-point scale) of public affairs viewing (national news, news specials and documentaries, local news, and news magazine and interview shows); attention paid (three-point scale) to each of three levels of government news on television; and ranking of television news (reliance) as a source of political news relative to other media. The corresponding newspaper variables were: frequency (days per week) of reading a newspaper; frequency of public affairs reading (international affairs, national, state, and local government and politics); attention paid to stories of each of three levels of government; and ranking of newspapers as a source of political news. Gratifications Sought, common to both media, was a composite of the endorsement (three-point scale) of nine reasons for seeking information in a presidential campaign (e.g., to see how the candidates stand on issues).

Two types of perceptions were analyzed separately for television and newspapers. The first involved summing responses to three questions of how helpful respondents thought television news/newspapers would be in the election campaign to find out issue stands, personal qualities of candidates and in making voting decisions. The second type of perception, estimated completeness of television news and newspaper coverage in presidential campaigns, was indexed on a scale ranging from 0 to 10.

Results

Levels of Knowledge

It appears that respondents were well aware of advertising as the economic base of American media (94.8% correct in Table I). About two-thirds of the sample knew

that politicians distribute advance copies of speeches and that the local media have more news than they can use. Three persons in five knew that local newspaper editorial staffs were larger than those of television and about half were able to name a wire service. Only half were correct in stating that journalists were not licensed by the state and that they had no special access to meetings closed to the public.

With respect to television, about two-thirds were correct in believing that the FCC can limit commercial time and in knowing that there are three commercial television stations in the area (Table II). About three respondents in five correctly identified as false statements that news stories are routinely submitted to advertisers and that political candidates receive free time for commercials. Only half could name an audience rating service and only a minority (38.2%) could say which local station had the largest coverage area.

Newspaper knowledge levels were even less impressive (Table II). About three-fifths of the respondents knew that local papers get most of their news from wire services, could say which local paper had the larger circulation, and said that the statement that local governments could suspend publication was false. But less than half knew that the FCC does not regulate newspapers and that political parties could own newspapers.

The 12 dichotomous media knowledge items allow the best test against a random guessing model of chance. The average proportion correct for these items is 59.8 percent. While it is statistically significant beyond the chance 50 percent, it certainly could not be called overwhelming.

Favorability of Attitudes

Attitudes toward the news media are shown in Table III. The results show mixed support for the media. Most respondents rejected stronger regulation to protect privacy (58.6%) and most felt media organizations would resist attempts by politicians to suppress stories (58.2%). On the other hand, less than half (44.4%) took the

media position in rejecting the statement that reporters become too involved with candidates and only one-fourth disagreed that the media sometimes behave as if their own interest outweighs public interest and that news stories often reflect the biases of reporters.

Support for both media was reflected in the strong majorities agreeing that they make information easier to understand. This was somewhat stronger for television news (82.3%) than for newspapers (74.3%). Television news is also given somewhat stronger support than newspapers in disagreement with statements that they tell only the bad things that happen (77.7% vs. 70.2%) and that they tend to present only one side of an issue (66.3% vs. 59.7%). Slightly more people feel that newspapers fit their lifestyle best (57.2% vs. 53.5%) but this difference is not significant.

Based on earlier findings of Becker et al.[5], we expected a positive relationship between the levels of knowledge about media and the favorability of attitutes toward the media. This did not obtain in our sample where a .00 correlation coefficient was found for television and only a +.06 shown for newspapers.

Prediction of Media Knowledge

The simple zero-order correlation coefficients of the antecedent variables and television news knowledge reveal patterns not unlike those found frequently in the past for other areas (political, economic) knowledge (Table IV). Those most knowledgeable about television news tend to be more politically informed (.47), more educated (.37) and to have had previous contact with reporters and news gathering (.27). They also tend to be more interested in politics, to discuss politics more often, to be male, perceive themselves to be of higher social status, and are younger.

Obviously, many of these antecedents are themselves related. To clarify the prediction for knowledge, we used hierarchical regression introducing the four demographic items as the first block of variables. They accounted for 17.4 percent of the variance in television knowledge, with age (young) and education revealing significant influence (betas) after all other variables were controlled.

The six political variables, introduced as the second block, accounted for an additional 12.6 percent of the variance in knowledge. After all variables were controlled, the more politically knowledgeable and Democrats were shown to be more knowledgeable about television news.

The final block, media experiences, added a small yet significant increment (0.7 percent) to the prediction of television news knowledge. Experience with reporters, which had a significant zero-order relationship to knowledge, declined to non-significant levels after all other variables were controlled while the viewing of television entertainment shows involving media characters (e.g., WKRP in Cincinnati) reached significance after controls.

Newspaper knowledge analyses are shown in the last three columns of Table IV. Not surprisingly, given the overlap of items between the two knowledge indices[6], the zero-order coefficients for newspapers are very similar to those of television news. The regression analyses, however, revealed some differences. While the overall prediction of newspaper knowledge is slightly less than that shown for television news (28.1% vs. 30.7%), the individual betas remaining significant for newspapers included all those found for television news plus higher knowledge levels for males, for the politically interested and for those with previous experience with reporters.

Prediction of Attitudes

In sharp contrast to the strong relationships found between the antecedent variables and television news knowledge, the favorability of television news attitudes was not well predicted (Table IV). Among the 12 antecedent variables, only people with more politically efficacious attitudes (.14) and those with previous experiences with reporters (.08) showed significant relationships to attitudes at the zero-order level.

Hierarchical regression showed that political efficacy and experience with reporters remained significantly related to favorable television news attitudes after

all other variables were controlled. The entire model, however, accounts for only a non-significant 2.5 percent of the variance in attitudes. This is far less than the prediction of 30.7 percent of the variance in television news knowledge with the same set of predictor variables.

Prediction of newspaper attitudes shows a similarly weak pattern in the last three columns of Table V. Only two variables are significantly associated at the zero-order level and three after all controls are introduced. Older, less knowledgeable but more efficacious respondents have more favorable attitudes toward newspapers. The 4.3% of the variance accounted for by the 12 variables is significant but not sizeable.

Consequences of Knowledge and Attitudes: Television

It is reasonable to assume that knowing more about television news and holding it in higher regard should affect the way people use television news. To test that possibility, we conducted regression analyses of four television use variables (shown in Table VI). Television news knowledge and attitudes were introduced as a fourth block after the effects of demographic, political and media experience block effects had been ascertained.

We did not expect that knowledge and attitudes would be strong enough to affect the total time spent with television because time spent with news represents only a small proportion of the time people spend with television. This was confirmed in the first set of columns of Table V. Knowledge and attitudes toward television news were unrelated to total television time at both the zero-order and controlled levels. Demographic variables accounted for a significant 2.6 percent of the television time variance, but no individual variable remained significant after all others are controlled. Political variables did not predict television time, but two media experience variables accounted for 6.8 percent of the residual variance. Not surprisingly, those who watch television shows with media characters spent a lot of time with television generally. Those who have had contact with reporters in real life, on the other hand, tend to spend <u>less</u> than average amounts of time with television.

We might expect those with more knowledge of television and those holding more favorable attitudes toward it would spend more time watching public affairs programming and to pay closer attention to it. This is not supported by the evidence. Neither knowledge nor attitudes predicts to either public affairs use or attention (Table VI). Older respondents and the more politically interested are significantly related to both aspects of news programming. Less obviously, those most likely to watch television entertainment shows with news media characters on them are also the heaviest users and attenders to public affairs content. In the case of public affairs viewing time, actual experiences with reporters also reveals a significant relationship.

The final analysis in Table VI, reliance on television news, does show some influence of knowledge and attitudes at the zero-order level. After controls, low television knowledge drops below significance while that for attitudes remains. Among the other predictors examined after controlling for all other variables, rightward or moderate ideological positions and watching of shows with media characters are associated with television reliance.

Two variables, taken from the uses and gratifications literature, are analyzed in Table VII. Television news knowledge and attitudes seem unrelated to the sum of gratifications sought from political news. At the zero-order level greater knowledge of television news is related to lesser estimates of how helpful television news will be in the upcoming political campaign, but this relationship drops to non-significant levels after all other variables are controlled. Other variables were associated with gratifications sought and perceived helpfulness of television news. Higher levels of gratifications are sought by the more politically interested persons, by those discussing politics most frequently, by the more partisan, and by those watching media entertainment shows most often. Expectations that television news would fulfill these gratifications was more strongly expressed by the lesser educated, by those perceiving higher status, by those more interested but less knowledgeable, and, again, by avid media show viewers.

The final potential consequence, perception of television news as being relatively complete, was related to low levels of media knowledge at both the zero-order and controlled levels (Table VII). Favorable attitudes were also related positively to perceived completeness both before and after controls. Several other variables are related to perceived completeness after controls. Older persons, those with less education, women, those with less political knowledge and frequent viewers of media entertainment shows all tended to see television news as being relatively complete.

Consequences of Knowledge and Attitudes: Newspapers

Although the frequency of newspaper readership was well predicted by the complete set of 16 variables (19.5% in Table VIII), neither newspaper knowledge nor favorable attitudes to that medium was associated with frequent use. Knowledge was positively related at the zero-order level, but dropped out after controls were introduced. Attitudes were unrelated to use, but other characteristics remained after controls. The more frequent newspaper readers tended to be older, to see themselves of higher social class, to be more politically knowledgeable and to have some previous experience with reporters.

A similar pattern was shown for public affairs use and attention (Table VIII). Newspaper knowledge was associated positively at the zero-order level but not after controls. Attitudes toward the press was unrelated to use and attention. More frequent and more attentive readers of public affairs content tended to be older, more politically interested and to have had some previous experience with reporters. Political knowledge was related to frequency but not to attention to news.

Reliance on newspapers as a source of information was not well predicted (4.7% in Table VIII). Although nine of the 16 variables were significant at the zero-order level, only attitudes toward newspapers remains so after all controls. Contrary to expectations, respondents with less favorable attitudes toward newspapers tended to rely on newspapers more than did others. For the most part, these more critical people chose television rather than newspapers as their major source of information.

Neither newspaper knowledge nor attitudes predicts to the first perception variable, gratifications sought (Table IX). At the zero-order level, those evaluating newspapers more favorably were those more strongly motivated, but this dropped below significance after controls. Because the gratifications sought variable is the same as that used in the television analyses (Table VII), the other political predictors of motivation were the same in both analyses.

In contrast to the analyses of television helpfulness, expectations about the helpfulness of newspapers in the election campaign was not well predicted (3.3% in Table IX vs. 11.1% for television). Opposite to the television findings, the frequent viewers of media entertainment shows tended to perceive newspapers as being less helpful than did other people. Surprisingly, those with less favorable attitudes toward newspapers tended to see newspapers as being relatively helpful. These same anti-newspaper attitude respondents also were more likely than others to see the newspaper as being relatively complete. The lesser educated and women were other sub-groups likely to evaluate newspapers as being complete. Overall, newspaper completeness was not well predicted (3.2%) in contrast to television completeness (16.3%).

Discussion

We have provided some evidence for conclusions about seven research questions. To the first question, how much does the public know about the structure and operation of television and newspaper news, we must answer "not very much" but that it depends upon the particular question asked.[7] Advertising is correctly assessed as critical to the operation of American commercial television, for example. We found knowledge levels to be somewhat beyond chance for most other items. The lack of strong intercorrelation among the knowledge items, however, leads us to conclude that many people have some scattered information about how television works but few people have strong well-organized patterns of knowledge of news operations. Certain areas of knowledge could be characterized as exhibiting widespread ignorance: licensing of journalism, access privileges of media reporters and the names of wire

services, audience rating organizations, the call letters of the most powerful local station and regulation and ownership of newspapers.

The second question, what attitudes does the public hold about television and newspaper news, also requires a somewhat complicated answer. The dominant pattern is supportive. A large majority sees both media as making the news easier to understand and rejects the frequently repeated charges that they tell only bad news and present a biased picture. A majority rejects stronger government regulation to protect privacy and have confidence that the media would not allow politicians to suppress news. Yet most people see the news media as being overly concerned with conflict, as presenting biased news stories and as sometimes not acting in the public interest. If the attitude "scoreboard" has mixed results, it also shows that atttiudes toward news are not monolithically positive or negative. That is, our sample could not be characterized being divided into universally strong supporters and strong detractors. Rather, most people tended to be somewhat supportive in some areas and somewhat critical in others.

The third question, are higher levels of knowledge associated with more favorable attitudes toward television news, can be answered with a simple "no." The knowledgeable respondents were no more likely than others to have positive attitudes toward television news. This could be a problem for those who would try to change attitudes toward news through educational and other campaigns to increase public information about the media. On the other hand, the relatively low levels of association within the knowledge and attitude items suggest that certain positive and negative relationships may be found between particular knowledge and attitude items that might be meaningfully interpretable. We will attempt to examine this possibility in subsequent analyses with our data set.

The fourth question, what factors account for higher levels of awareness of media news operations, was answered in terms of several different variables. Younger people and the more educated know more about how media news works.[8] This was expected, as was the strong prediction of media knowledge by political knowledge. Less

easy to interpret was the finding that political independence and those watching media entertainment shows also were more knowledgeable. We will examine the latter more closely in analyses of existing data. Further data gathering might include more detailed questions about schooling and media use as sources of television news knowledge.

The fifth question, are these same background factors associated with more favorable attitudes toward television and newspaper news, must be answered with a definite no. None of the five variables related to knowledge after controls was also associated with favorable attitudes. Instead, another attitude variable, political efficacy, was related to favorable television news media attitudes as was direct experience in the news gathering process. In general, however, we failed to predict to media attitudes. This may be due in part to the diffuse nature of media attitudes and our failure to develop well measured interpretable sub-dimensions of news attitudes. Our failure also may be due to a lack of an adequate set of antecedent variables. We hope to work on both of these possibilities in the future.

The sixth question, does it matter what the public knows and believes about television and newspaper news, can be answered in part by examining the relationship of media knowledge and attitudes to various aspects of news use. Unfortunately, our evidence pointed to the pessimistic answer of "not much." Neither knowledge nor attitudes affected the time spent or attention paid to television news. For television, only reliance on that medium as a news source was predicted and these relationships were weak, and was negative in the case of knowledge. Newspaper knowledge predicted all four newspaper use variables at the zero-order level but in each case the relationship was eliminated by demographic and political controls. Newspaper attitudes predicted only newspaper reliance and that relationship was negative. Possibly, better measurement of media knowledge and attitudes and/or more sensitive effect variables will generate stronger relationships in the future.

The final question, do media knowledge and attitudes affect perceptions of helpfulness and completeness of television and newspaper news, was answered rather

tentatively. Results for television were only marginal after controls were introduced and in each case was negative in direction. Newspaper knowledge was unrelated to perceptions of helpfulness and completeness. These findings that increasing news knowledge was associated with perceptions of low anticipated helpfulness and incompleteness of television news may give little comfort to those who would fight the erosion of confidence in the news media through information campaigns. It should be said, however, that we are dealing here only with certain types of knowledge. Information in other areas of media operation might conceivably generate more favorable perceptions of media news.

It should be obvious by now that we recommend that much more explication and research needs to be done in developing the concepts of media news knowledge and attitudes. The failure to identify antecedents of news attitudes and the weak predictions of consequent variables by both media knowledge and attitudes should not be taken as evidence to abandon them as important mass communication concepts.

If the results for news knowledge and attitudes were somewhat disappointing, the strong associations of our two media experience variables proved to be a pleasant surprise. Watching of media entertainment shows like Lou Grant and WKRP in Cincinnati was related to: higher levels of "real" media knowledge; to time spent and attention paid to public affairs content on television; to reliance on television news; to seeking gratifications from political news and to expect television (but not newspapers) to be helpful in satisfying these needs; and to perceiving television news as being relatively complete. The magnitude of these relationships was substantial in most instances. Further analyses will examine which of these shows tend to predict to which effects. We will also see if the viewing of these shows interacts with exposure to television news in enhancing or restricting subsequent effects.

The other media experience variable, actual experiences with reporters, produced somewhat lesser relationships but ones which are nonetheless interesting. It was positively related to media knowledge initially, although this relationship

held only for newspaper knowledge after controls were introduced. It was related to holding more positive attitudes toward television news, to more frequent use of public affairs content on television and in newspapers, but also to lesser reliance on television, to expecting less helpfulness from television news and to perceiving it as being less complete. We also have data on respondents' estimates of how accurate the stories were that came out of the direct contact with reporters. These will be examined in future analyses.

Footnotes

1 For example, see Roper Organization, "Changing Public Attitudes Toward Television and other Mass Media 1959-1976," (New York: Television Information Office, 1977).

2 Maxwell E. McCombs and Laura Washington, "Opinion Surveys offer Conflicting News as to how Public Views Press," Presstime 5: 4-9 (February, 1983). Roper, op. cit. According to Harris poll data, public confidence in television news in 1982 was at its lowest level since the question was first asked in 1973.

3 Lee B. Becker, D. Charles Whitney and Erik L. Collins, "Public Understanding of How Media Operate," Journalism Quarterly 57: 571-578, 605 (1980). D. Charles Whitney and Steven B. Goldman, "Public Attitudes and Public Knowledge about Mass Media in the U.S." (Paper presented at the International Association for Mass Communication Research conference, Paris, 1982).

4 Lee B. Becker, Robin E. Cobbey and Idowu A. Sobowale, "Public Support for the Press," Journalism Quarterly 55: 421-430 (1978). John Immerwahr and John Doble, "Public Attitudes toward Freedom of the Press" Public Opinion Quarterly 46: 177-187 (1982). Leo Bogart, Press and Public (Hillsdale, NJ: Ehrlbaum, 1981). Jerry Kosicki, "Public Attitudes and Public Knowledge about the Mass Media" (Unpublished paper, Mass Communications Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1983).

5 Becker et al., 1980, op. cit. report a correlation of -.21 between media knowledge and media criticism.

6 Having a common set of general media items produced a .76 correlation coefficient between television news knowledge and newspaper knowledge. In subsequent analyses, we will attempt to disaggregate the knowledge and attitude indices to estimate the unique effect of those variables for each medium.

7 Our conclusions are quite similar to those of Becker et al., 1980, op. cit. in this respect.

8 Becker et al., 1980, op. cit. have parallel findings in that education, personal media contact and viewing of TV shows about media all predicted to their measure of media knowledge.

Table I

Knowledge of the News Media: Proportion of Sample Getting Each Item Correct

Question	Proportion Correct	N =
Advertising is the principle source of revenue for both newspapers and television stations (T)	94.8	823
Reporters often know in advance what a politician plans to say in a speech since they are routinely provided with advance copies of the speech (T)	70.3	408
Local media usually have more news than they have space or time for (T)	64.6	415
Do Madison's daily newspapers or commercial television stations have a larger reporting staff? (newspapers)	59.8	408
Can you name one of the major news services that serve the news media? (AP etc.)	52.1	823
The State requires reporters to have a license to practice journalism (F)	51.6	415
Reporters have special privileges under law that allow them to attend government meetings even if the meetings are closed to the public (F)	46.8	408

Correct answers are indicated in brackets

Table II

Knowledge of Television and Newspaper News: Proportion of Sample Getting Each Item Correct

Question	Proportion Correct	N =
Television Items		
The Federal Communications Commission limits the number of commercials that television stations may run each hour (T)	67.0	415
How many commercial television stations operate in the Madison area? (3)	65.7	823
Television stations routinely submit news stories to advertisers for approval (F)	62.2	823
During a political campaign, each candidate is guaranteed free time for campaign commercials (F)	59.3	408
Can you name an audience rating service, a company that measures the size of an audience (ARB etc.)	51.3	415
Which Madison commercial television station has the largest coverage area (WISC-TV)	38.2	408
Newspaper Items		
Local newspapers get most of their stories from news services (T)	64.6	415
Which Madison area daily newspaper has the largest circulation (Wis. State Journal)	63.9	823
Newspapers can be suspended from publishing by a local government if they violate public interest (F)	61.5	415
Does the Federal Communications Commission regulate newspaper operation? (No)	40.2	415
Political parties can own daily newspapers (T)	34.2	408

Correct answers are indicated in brackets

Table III

Attitude Toward Television News: Proportion taking "pro-media" position

Question			N
There should be stronger regulation of the news media by the government in order to protect individuals' rights to privacy (disagree)		58.6	681
Politicians can usually pressure newspaper and television organizations into not releasing stories embarrassing to their interests (disagree)		58.2	704
Reporters who cover candidates often become too involved with the candidates personally and write favorable stories about them (disagree)		44.4	671
Sometimes the media behave as if their own interests outweigh the interests of the public in the types of news that gets reported (disagree)		25.9	714
News stories often reflect the personal political biases of the reporters who cover the events (disagree)		25.4	681
The news media tend to cover political groups more on the basis of controversy surrounding a group than on the political importance of the group (disagree)		15.7	675
Tends to make information easier to understand (agree)	Television	82.3	725
	Newspapers	74.3	677
Only tells about the bad things that happen (disagree)	Television	77.7	734
	Newspapers	70.2	738
Tends to present only one side of an issue (disagree)	Television	66.3	695
	Newspapers	59.7	696
Tends to fit my lifestyle better than any other medium (agree)	Television	53.5	688
	Newspapers	57.2	661

N is based only on Respondent having an opinion--agreeing or disagreeing. Pro-media responses are indicated in brackets.

Table IV

Prediction of Television and Newspaper News Knowledge by Demographic, Political and Media Experience Variables: Simple r, Betas and Incremental Variance

	Television News			Newspaper News		
Antecedent Variable	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2
Demographic						
Age of respondent	-.17*	-.16*		-.17*	-.14*	
Education	.37*	.14*		.35*	.14*	
Perceived social class	.18*	.05		.13*	.02	
Gender (male)	.19*	.02	17.4*	.22*	.07*	16.1*
Political						
Interest	.25*	.07		.29*	.14*	
Discussion	.22*	.00		.24*	-.01	
Knowledge	.47*	.38*		.41*	.28*	
Efficacy	.03	.05		.06	.06	
Partisanship	-.03	-.09*		-.03	-.10*	
Ideology (right)	-.08*	.00	12.6*	-.08*	-.01	10.6*
Media Experiences						
Media entertainment shows	.06	.07*		.08*	.10*	
Experiences w/ reporters	.27*	.05	0.7*	.29*	.08*	1.4*
			30.7*			28.1*

N = 735 * = $p<.05$

Table V

Prediction of Favorable Attitudes Toward Television and Newspaper News by Demographic, Political and Media Experience Variables: Simple r, Betas and Incremental Variance

	Television News			Newspaper News		
Antecedent Variable	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2
Demographic						
Age of respondent	.04	.04		.06	.08*	
Education	.03	.03		-.03	.02	
Perceived social class	.01	-.01		-.01	.00	
Gender (male)	.01	.00	0.3	-.01	.01	0.4
Political						
Interest	.02	-.04		.02	-.01	
Discussion	.06	.05		.05	.08	
Knowledge	.01	-.04		-.08*	-.15*	
Efficacy	.14*	.11*		.15*	.15*	
Partisanship	-.01	.01		.02	.00	
Ideology (right)	.02	.01	1.6	.02	-.01	3.9*
Media Experiences						
Media entertainment shows	-.01	.00		.01	.01	
Experiences w/ reporters	.08*	.09*	0.6	.01	.03	0.1
			2.5			4.3*

N = 735 * = $p<.05$

Table VI

Prediction of Television Use Effects by Antecedent Variables, Television News Knowledge and Television News Attitudes

	Total TV Time			Public Affairs Use			Public Aff. Attention			Television Reliance		
	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2
Demographic												
Age of respondent	-.02	.00		.12*	.13*		.14*	.16*		.01	-.01	
Education	-.13*	-.06		-.05	-.06		.01	-.02		-.11*	-.03	
Perceived social class	-.13*	-.07		-.03	-.03		-.01	-.02		-.07	-.04	
Gender (male)	-.01	.04	2.6%*	-.04	-.04	1.5%*	.06	.06	2.5%*	-.10*	-.07*	2.2%*
Political												
Interest	-.05	-.03		.18*	.17*		.31*	.29*		-.05	.03	
Discussion	-.01	.05		.11*	.01		.21*	.07		-.06	.00	
Knowledge	-.09*	-.03		.05	-.01		.10*	-.06		-.11*	-.02	
Efficacy	.04	.04		.04	.00		.06	.02		.00	.01	
Partisanship	-.04	-.05		-.09*	-.03		-.07*	.03		.06	.05	
Ideology (right)	-.02	-.03	0.1	.07*	.07	4.5*	.03	.03	9.6*	.09*	.09*	1.1
Media Experiences												
Media entertainment shows	.27*	.25*		.28*	.30*		.18*	.20*		.08*	.07*	
Experiences w/ reporters	-.12*	-.09*	6.8*	.08*	.08*	8.8*	.09*	.01	4.0*	-.11*	-.05	
Television News												
Knowledge	-.05	.00		.02	.00		.07	.02		-.11*	-.07	
Favorable attitudes	.06	.05	0.2	.03	.05	0.2	.01	.02	0.1	.09*	.09*	0.1*
			10.5*			15.1*			16.2*			5.0*

N = 735 * = $p<.05$

Table VII

Prediction of Television News Perceptions by Antecedent Variables, Television News Knowledge and Television News Attitudes

	Gratific. Sought			TV News Helpfulness			TV News Completeness		
	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2
Demographic									
Age of respondent	.10*	.06		.03	.03		.12*	.08*	
Education	-.04	-.07		-.19*	-.12*		-.30*	-.19*	
Perceived social class	-.01	-.01		.00	.09*		-.11*	-.02	
Gender (male)	-.02	-.04	1.1%	-.10*	-.01	4.2%*	-.19*	-.09*	11.7%*
Political									
Interest	.29*	.25*		-.01	.09*		-.12*	-.04	
Discussion	.24*	.13*		-.02	.02		-.07	.07	
Knowledge	.08*	.02		-.17*	-.12*		-.26*	-.12*	
Efficacy	.08*	.03		.01	.01		.01	.01	
Partisanship	.17*	.07*		-.01	.01		-.05	-.06	
Ideology (right)	.00	.00	12.0*	.05	.02	1.6	.04	-.01	2.2*
Media Experiences									
Media entertainment shows	.10*	.10*		.22*	.22*		.12*	.11*	
Experiences w/ reporters	.03	-.05	1.1*	-.11*	-.04	4.7*	-.16*	.01	1.1*
Television News									
Knowledge	-.03	-.03		-.14*	-.08		-.25*	-.10*	
Favorable attitudes	-.05	-.07	0.0	.04	.04	0.5	.09*	.09*	1.4*
			14.2*			11.1*			16.3*

N = 735 * = $p<.05$

Table VIII

Prediction of Newspaper Use Effects by Antecedent Variables, Newspaper News Knowledge and Newspaper News Attitudes

	Freq. of Reading			Public Affairs Use			Public Aff. Attention			Newspaper Reliance		
	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2
Demographic												
Age of respondent	.33*	.36*		.22*	.23*		.17*	.19*		.05	.06	
Education	.07*	.00		.14*	.04		.06	-.03		.07*	.02	
Perceived social class	.14*	.08*		.05	-.04		.02	-.03		.06	.02	
Gender (male)	.06	-.02	15.0*	.07	-.01	8.8*	.07	.02	4.5*	.11*	.07	2.3*
Political												
Interest	.15*	-.01		.32*	.17*		.31*	.21*		.11*	.03	
Discussion	.13*	.06		.25*	.07		.24*	.08		.08*	.02	
Knowledge	.24*	.12*		.27*	.09*		.17*	.00		.16*	.08	
Efficacy	.02	-.04		.05	.01		.04	-.02		.03	.01	
Partisanship	.12*	.04		.13*	.02		.12*	.03		.08*	.04	
Ideology (right)	.07*	.03	2.8*	-.02	-.01	8.6*	-.02	-.01	8.8*	.02	.02	1.3
Media Experiences												
Media Entertainment shows	.17*	.05		-.03	.02		-.01	.02		.02	.05	
Experiences w/ reporters	.08	.14*	1.6*	.24*	.14*	1.4*	.19*	.11*	1.0*	.08*	.01	0.2
Newspaper News												
Knowledge	.08*	.02		.12*	.00		.12*	.05		.07*	.00	
Favorable attitudes	-.01	-.03	0.1	-.05	-.06	0.3	.03	.01	0.2	-.09*	-.09*	0.9*
			19.5*			19.1*			14.5*			4.7*

N = 735 * = $p<.05$

Table IX

Prediction of Newspaper News Perceptions by Antecedent Variables

Newspaper News Knowledge and Newspaper News Attitudes

	Gratific. Sought			Newspaper Helpfulness			Newspaper Completeness		
	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2
Demographic									
Age of respondent	.10*	.07		-.08*	-.08		-.01	-.04	
Education	-.04	-.09*		.01	.01		-.09*	-.12*	
Perceived social class	-.01	-.01		.01	.00		.00	.02	
Gender (male)	-.02	-.04	0.1	-.07	-.07	1.3	-.08*	-.09*	1.6*
Political									
Interest	.29*	.24*		.01	.07		-.02	-.03	
Discussion	.24*	.13*		-.03	-.05		-.01	.03	
Knowledge	.08*	.00		-.08*	-.09		.02	.04	
Efficacy	.08*	.02		-.02	.02		.00	.01	
Partisanship	.17*	.08*		-.01	.01		.04	.05	
Ideology (right)	.00	.00	11.5*	-.04	-.02	0.6	-.03	-.04	0.7
Media Experiences									
Media entertainment shows	.10*	.10*		-.06	-.08*		.07	.05	
Experiences with reporters	.03	-.05	1.1*	-.01	.00	0.6	-.04	-.01	0.3
Newspaper News									
Knowledge	.05	.01		.00	.03		-.02	-.01	
Favorable attitudes	.09*	.07	0.5	-.09*	-.09*	0.9*	-.08*	-.08*	0.7
			14.2*			3.3*			3.2

N = 735 * = $p<.05$